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PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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GOD'S LOVE SPECIFIC AND PERSONAL.

And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.—GAL. II. 20.

It is not the intensity of this experience that I wish to point out, but its peculiar element of personalness. The life that the apostle lives in the flesh, the inmost life, the secret spring of it, is that which is derived from his love to Christ—from his faith of the Son of God. And that Son of God presented himself to his imagination and to his thought as what? As one who loved the great lover? No, not that; but as one who loved *me*; who gave himself for *me*. There is a characteristic element of this experience—the recognition of the divine love, and the bringing home of that love to one's own personal experience. The Gospel teaching is that God's love is the prime and grand attribute of his nature. This is the foundation of government, the source of moral law, the philosophy of history, the one golden thread on which all events are strung—although often it is hidden by the things strung upon it.

But this view suggests God's benevolence to our minds, rather than God's love. It is a golden haze of good-will that we look into. So, men think, the summer sun shines on the hills universally, and nourishes infinite flowers and fruits, and cares for nothing of all its brood. It makes them, and fondly fingers them until they are moulded, and fills them with sweet incense and sweet flavors, and then leaves them. For the sun cares not that the apple drops, or that the flower withers. They live, and they perish, and the sun goes on. And when all are cut off, and it rolls in winter, it seems to be just as merry, and just as bright, and just as joyous a sun as it was in the midst of summer.

So men think that God's beneficence is a kind of sunlight, flaming with a flashing fire abroad. It does throw down a certain good will upon everybody, and upon everything indifferently, without regard to character or position. A certain sunshine of the divine nature it is. And so many conceive of God's love as being so universal that it is hardly personal. It is atmospheric to their thought—not minute, not specific.

But the God of revelation is a father. Mankind are his children. He knows all of them, and is personal to each, and is specific to every

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individual creature of the vast household, innumerable and inconceivable by us. The thought of God points to each one; and as if there was but a single creature in the universe, he looks on that one. As long ago as Isaiah, God had declared,

"I have called thee by thy name,"

as I read in your hearing this morning. And still again, if possible with more minuteness, in the forty-fifth chapter, he says,

"I have even called thee by thy name. I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me. I girded thee, though thou has not known me."

The personality and the disinterestedness and the universality of the divine love are wonderfully set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures —particularly in the later disclosures of the prophets.

The presentation of this thought stirs up a great many doubts in those who have been exercised thereby. Men think that Paul probably was beloved, that Peter was beloved, and that many others were beloved. Men look around, and think that their mother was beloved, and that others, with superior natures and symmetrical parts, and full of moral excellences, were beloved. They can well conceive how those who draw upon their amiable feelings, might likewise excite in the divine mind personal affection. But they say, "When men love single persons, it does not follow that they love all persons. And God loves men, doubtless; but does he love every one?" *God so loved the world*, is the comprehensive answer to that question. God loved the world, and the *whole* world. And the word *world*, for its definition and boundaries, runs through all time, and among all races. It includes in it all individuals, from age to age. Everywhere God loved the *whole world*.

"Yes," men say, "but God loves men after he has made them loveable." But the apostle says, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners Christ died* for *us*." Love which death tested but could not measure, was shed abroad toward each man and the whole world, without moral conditions. That is the import of what the apostle says. God's disinterestedness is made plain, in that he loves each man, not on condition of repentance, but whether he repents or not. He loves men, not because there is that in them which has a tendency to excite complacency, but though they are sinful. He loves unlovely men. Yea, men that we could not love, God loves. And his love is not generic. It is not a part of the governmental benevolence. It is individualized both ways—in the heart of God, and in the heart of the recipients. It is God's nature to love what his eye looks upon. Every human being, whether he is good, or whether he is bad, God loves. I do not say that it makes no difference to God whether men are good, or whether they are bad, but I do say that the great crowning fact of divine love has no respect of character—that it precedes character, and is not founded upon it.

To be sure, the benefit of that love to us depends very largely upon our faith, and upon our repentance; but the existence of the divine personal love does not depend on us in any wise. It is—if I may apply to God language which belongs to men—the constitutional nature of God. It is the tendency of his attributes. This is that which makes Jesus Jehovah, God, and all others liars. It is this power of universal and yet individualizing love which has in it creative influence, cleansing influence, but which precedes all cleansing and all creative results.

Love is the test of divinity. It carries with it a great many other things. It carries with it in God the conception of purity, and of uprightness, and of integrity of disposition, and of justice, and of truth. It carries with it, also, the full idea of instrumentality—both penalty and reward, pleasure and pain. And back of all these, as the root-ground out of which they spring, as the source from which they come, as the animating influence which runs through them all, is love. And that love is personal to us. It is divine, infinite; and yet it touches each one by name throughout the whole realm.

Men have familiarized themselves, however, with those elements of the divine character which are nearest to their own natures, or which are represented by the things that are most familiar to them in the material world around them. And so it has come to pass that force, universality, knowledge, seem to them far more potent attributes in the nature of God than love does. We think that God is omnipotent, omnicient, omnipresent; we think that he is just and good; we think that he is impartial and righteous; but we think that love is something that comes in after all the conditions of these other attributes have been satisfied. When men shall have so arranged nature and character that they stand before God at such an angle or in such a light that the love of purity is satisfied, and the love of justice is satisfied, and the love of obedience and law and government is satisfied, then whatever remains in them, whatever virtue is left, is love. And that love is supposed to be the premium of perfected obedience afterwards; whereas, in the representations of the Bible, love goes first of all, and is the reason of everything in the divine character and the divine administration.

You know how forts are built. There are outworks; there are lines of deep ditches to keep off the enemy; there are ramparts on which swarms, at every angle, mighty artillery, that crosses and recrosses in every direction. A fort is a vast mechanism of brute force, thrown up to protect those who are within, and to destroy those who assail it from without. And yet, somewhere, hid in the center of this vast complicated fort, there is a house where the commandant lives. And there he has his little parlor, and his family, and all the amenities of a loving household.

So men think of God's moral government. They have an idea that it is a thing of vast proportions, with its artillery, and huge laws, and sweeping outworking bulwarks of power, and right, and wrong, and penalty; but that hid somewhere back in that government, if you can only get through all this mighty maze, you will find there is a little house where God lives, and where he has a heart; and that there he is a God of love. And this is very naturally the conception, because we have borrowed our notions of God from bad analogies, from an unwise mode of philosophy, and from things which are the most simple to us—from animal forces, brute forces, natural forces.

As almost universally men make God a magistrate and not a father; as they derive their ideas of government from magisterial governments on earth—from human governments—from governments whose most important principles are made up to accommodate man's weakness, and never can be the analogues of divine government, in which are infinite wisdom and strength; as we have derived our chief conception of God from things in ourselves and about ourselves, so it has come to pass that from the beginning down to this day, and yet, and among Christian people, and in Christian congregations, the predominating idea of God is stone—stone at the foundation; stone all the way up the lighthouse; stone until, far up in the air, there is a little crystal dome, where the lighthouse sends out its light—all stone, except one small star, hanging in the void atmosphere.

It is no wonder, then, that men, in coming to the comprehension, to the love, and to the service of such a being, have to cumber themselves with huge doubts, suffering, and trouble, before they work out that perfect conception of God by which they are able to say, out of their own joyous, summer-like consciousness, "He died for *me*; the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved *me*, and who loves *me*, and who gave himself in form and shadow once for *me*, and now in reality is giving his eternal life, and all the effulgence and fullness of it, is giving himself for ever and for ever, for *me*,—just as much for *me* as if there were not another person in the universe, although there are countless myriads."

We are to apply to this grand centre of divinity all those measures by which we strive to interpret infinity in other directions in the divine nature. We speak of God's infinite wisdom rather as running out along the line of science. We trace all the gradations in creation. We trace all the mechanisms of the infinite fillings up that go from star to star. We then listen to the testimony of the probabilities as respects the scope, the extent, the magnitude, of the physical creation, and we are lost in the conception of the wisdom that can provide, and regulate, and care for, this infinite procession of things. So that we come

to a very enormous conception of God's infinity, in the direction of wisdom. And by the same line of reasoning, we trace out the divine power, and gain a conception of infinity in relation to the realm of physics as the witness of God's power.

Now, love is just as really infinite as wisdom, and is prior to it. It has precedence of it. If we are accustomed to think of God's infinite, measureless, unaccountable, productive power; and if we think of God's infinite being in the direction of wisdom, why do we not take the yet nobler attribute of God's love, and run that out by infinities, and by analogues and illustrations that shall make it as vast, as voluminous, as potent, as other divine attributes? For it is his own consciousness, without a doubt, in which he glories.

When Moses asked to be permitted to behold God, that he might have some balanced conception of the divine nature and government, four-fifths of the picture that was displayed to him, the dramatic representation that was made before him, was God's long-suffering, and mercy, and forgiveness, and kindness, and graciousness, and goodness, and love. And when Moses asked to see God's glory, what the Lord himself thought to be the most beautiful and the noblest things about himself, were graciousness, goodness, long-suffering. "These," saith the Lord, "are my most glorious attributes, although I will not clear the guilty." Such was the portrait; and this was simply the addition to prevent the perversion of it—as we shall have occasion, before we are done, to prevent the perversion of the doctrine.

Here is the equator, if I may so say, or the diameter, of the divine nature. It is greater at this point than at the point of wisdom, or at the point of power—or rather, it is more influential. For, although we may not say that one divine attribute is greater than another, we may say that one has more emphasis, and more importance, and more influence than another, in a moral scale.

Love, then, is the ministrant force of the universe. It is that energy which lies behind all phenomena; which creates law, and shapes government, and administers them both. It is that which lies behind all pain, and all sorrow, and all suffering. These things seem here to spring from malign causes, because many men think they do, to a very large extent; and they are traced back and over to a demoniac God, or to demons. But, according to the teachings of the New Testament, God's central nature is love, and his government is the issue of that love; and all the phenomena in the universe, if they are traced back to their source, will be found at last to have been coördinated under this great central attribute and element of the divine character.

Force and penalty are sent out by love, and are but its hands. Justice and indignation are but so many surgeon-hands of love. The

whole play of light, and of shadow, of tears and of groans, of sorrows and of turmoil, in time, either have sprung from, or have been permitted by, infinite central love, and at last will be found to have been working in the cause of that love. For God is love; and God is government; and government is love; and all phenomena are intimately blended or connected with it.

With these declarations before us, I proceed to some points of application.

1. The Love of God is the one truth which nature, as it is developed by matter alone, cannot teach us. Why do men need revelation? Because, although there are analogies which receive light afterwards, and interpret something to us of the divine nature, there is nothing in nature itself, as far as by that term we mean the physical globe, which would ever tell us that the great central element and influence of the universe is love.

Power, wisdom, skill, taste, goodness,—of these we may find evidences in the divine character as interpreted through nature; but even the Apostle Paul, when reasoning to the Romans in respect to the revelations which nature gave of God, only claims that by nature they might know his "eternal power and Godhead"—that is to say, power and government. That we can interpret from nature; but who could make out an argument from nature in favor of divine benevolence alone, as distinct from personal love? No man can. When you come to consider all the organizations that evidently carry in their organic nature pain-producing tendencies, you find that every human faculty kicks back with just as much pain as it thrusts forward with pleasure. Every single faculty is made with a double action—with one action which is painful, and another that is joyful. And everywhere, all over the world, there are in nature agencies which tend to mischief—that is, to the production of pain, and disorder, and disorganization, and trouble. The whole natural world presents such phenomena that one school of philosophers think they come from chance, and have no regulation. And thoughtful men in every age of the world—Job, and the prophets, and all great natures since their time down to our present day, have reasoned upon this subject. And yet, it is one of the most profound pieces of speculation, how there can be a moral government, and yet so much suffering and power of evil, in this world. Where did evil come from? How did it happen to be in the world? Why is virtue so often chastised, and vice so often crowned with power and with enjoyment? If there be a God, and a God who loves, and is good and beneficent, why is the world what it is? The world has been the stumbling-block of thoughtful men from the beginning. Nor do I believe that nature can be made to teach us the personal qualities

of God; and still less, that He is a being supremely centred in one great, divine, universal, impartial personal love.

The struggles which we see going on for existence among all the races of animals; that law of success in the brute world by which strength always wins and weakness is always compelled to yield, is just exactly the reverse of the law of the spiritual kingdom, where they that would be chief are to be the servants, and the weakest are to be exalted, as in the arms of love, to the best experiences of pleasure and protection.

The mode in which men are created and scattered abroad upon the earth, through century-long periods, and left apparently to themselves, is another source of perplexity among thinking men. The greater part of the human race to-day have never had the light of revelation. Of the men that are spread abroad through Africa, nine hundred and ninety-nine men in a thousand have not even seen a twilight revelation; and the other one, to make up the thousand, has had only a twilight revelation. And yet, the law seems to go abroad upon the whole race. Whichever way we look, suffering, sorrow, limitation, mistake, yea, neglect, seems to be the order of things.

And then, the silence of God has always seemed to me a profound mystery. I never could understand, why, if there was over all this great world a Father, and an eternal Father, and his nature was love, he should not speak; why he should not show himself; why there should not be, as often as once in a thousand years, an appearance of God; why there should not be, at least once in a man's life-time, an answering voice that should make him perfectly certain of the existence of God, and of a moral government; why, the race being made as they are, being besotted as they are, and being, as they are, rolled and dashed in waves of conflict, every one of which is made up of myriad drops of blood, and this life being a vast brutal gladiation, as it were, God should be silent. Tell me, Nature, what you can, of such a God as this. Tell me if there be no need of a revelation which shall make known to us that which is behind all phenomena, and behind all that appears in the natural world. There is something that nature cannot interpret. There is something that the law of matter, the law of force, the law of organization, and the law of evolvement and development cannot interpret. There is something that it needed God's own self to make known, by holy men of old, moved by the Holy Ghost.

It is this necessity of God that he should make himself known that is the foundation of revealed religion. It is that peculiar need to-day which science least cares for, and most rejects; viz., a suffering, atoning Saviour. It is that which is most indispensable to men who put away from them all their instruction except that which they can

get from the rocks, from the soil, from the stars, from chemistry, from the mere elements of the material world. The secret forces of the globe leave us desolate, without a Father, without love, without sympathy, wanderers. We are as the mighty icebergs in the dark winters of the North, that grind each other, neither knowing what they do—only we know and feel, but are impelled by mighty forces. And if we have hope in this world only, and we have no God such as the Gospel reveals to us, we are of all men most miserable. And if there be any one thing that science cannot supply, and that natural philosophy cannot supply, it is this faith in a loving God, and a God whom we can love—something deeper than material phenomena; something behind the mask of matter—another world of spirit; another government besides the law of matter; another Being besides that fate which frowns, and fills the world with sorrow.

This is that which the Gospel of Christ has brought to us, and which nature could not give, and which man could not get through reason.

2. This truth of the Divine Love is the one truth through which nature looks, beyond all others in our apprehension, in our systems of theology, and in our preaching. For, although we have a talkative knowledge, though men speak of the love of God, there are comparatively few of us who have that crowning knowledge of it which indicates that it is genuine, deep, certain, abiding. There are very few who are able to realize more than this: "God is good, and ought to be loved; and I hope that I love Him." But ah! that greater truth of which this is the merest inflection—"God loves me, and has loved me since I was born. God's nature is such that he pours incessant thought upon me, upon my disposition, upon my circumstances, upon my nature, upon my trials, and upon my destiny; and my feeling toward my child that I am striving to bring up, father or mother though I be, is weak and pale compared with the intensity of the infinite love that I am the object of in God"—how many are there who have that, and who feel from day-to-day that they stand up in the love of God? As one stands up in the full sunlight that comes down upon him, and bathes him, and flows past him, and covers all that is about him, and goes on through leagues and latitudes and infinite spaces, and in inexhaustible abundances; so the love of God throws down upon the world, not enough to fill up your thimble-sized hearts alone, but enough to overflow you and go on in infinite waves for uncounted beings—and that forever and forever. How many men are there who walk every day, feeling, "I am the King's son; I am the Lord Jehovah's; and Jehovah loves me by name, knowing what my imagination is, knowing what my passions and appetites are, knowing what my pride is, knowing all the wallow of my selfishness, know-

ing all the obliquities of my disposition. Yet when the eye of God rests on me, it rests on me as a mother's eye rests upon her child. And the parent does not love the child according to its deserts. The parent loves the child whether it deserves it or not. And it is God's nature to love just so." How many are there who, as a matter of experience, feel that?

We think that if we fix ourselves up a little, God will perhaps love us. A man is in deep distress, and there is a great heart in the neighborhood (I hope there is at least one great heart in every neighborhood), and he is told that if he will go and tell that great heart what his mistakes have been, and what his misfortunes are, that great heart will certainly relieve him. And instantly he begins to think of himself, and to fix himself to go to that great heart, covering up his rags the best way he can, and hiding his elbows so that they shall not be seen, and putting a little touch on his shoes that are clouted and ruptured; and then goes in. But do you suppose it makes any difference to that great heart to whom he goes, that his clothes are a little less dirty, or that they have a few less patches on them, or that his shoes are a little less soiled or torn? It is the man behind the clothes that the benevolent heart thinks of. It is not what the needy man is, but what the benefactor is, that determines what he will do.

Why does he take that man into his compassion, and say to him, "Come again." Does he do it because of what he sees in the man? or because of what he feels in himself?

Why does a bird sing? Because he thinks you would like to hear him? No; but because there is that in him which tickles him and fires him till he has to sing. He sings to bring joy out of himself. He sings because it is his nature to sing.

A music-box does not play because you say, "Do play;" nor because you say, "It is exquisite and charming." It does not care for your compliments and comments.

And so it is with the divine nature. That is the way God is made—if I may use human language in application to the divine nature. That is being God. And yet, how few there are who think of God as generously as he thinks of them! How few say, "I am loved of God, unworthy though I be; poor though I am; though I be lean in all moral attributes. I forget him; but he never forgets me. I requite selfishness for goodness; but it never makes any ripple on the surface of that infinite ocean of benignity and love. I am bad; I am unfilial; I am ungrateful; I am wicked—desperately wicked; I am a transgressor in a multitude of ways; and yet there is a God who does not forget me, and who will hold me as in the hollow of his hand so long as love can by holding do good."

How few there are who think that God loves them! What is it? Do you think you love God? Do you think you have given your heart to Christ? That is not unimportant; but ah! the other thing is a thousand times more important; viz., Do you know that God loves *you?* Do you know that he gave himself for *you*, and that he lives for your sake, and that behind these phenomena of nature which we see on earth rise the real life and the real world—the great world of spirits, where are God, and love, and summer, and eternity, and joy unspeakable; and that they are yours?

So neither, as we leave this thought of divine love far behind in our experience, are we apt to fill it up enough in our theology. Men have built systems of theology in every age, and will and ought to till the end of the world; but men build their systems of theology, I think, with a great deal more consideration for material elements, for elements that are in sympathy with the lower forms of existence, than for elements that relate to their spiritual nature. And above all things men have built their theology, riveting and re-riveting every part of it, so that it shall stand against error; so that it shall be inexpugnable; so that it shall guard the government of God; so that it shall keep men from going in this or that wrong way. We have attempted to build a theology which shall prevent men from going wrong. But God himself never prevented a man's going wrong; and you will never do it. What we want in that direction is to get an influential conception of God; and our theology must bring God out in such lines, in such lineaments, and in such universal attractiveness, that men shall follow their yearnings and drawings, rather than their cold reasonings and intellections. We are perpetually teaching that God maintains law, and that he must maintain government; and at last we hear so much about law that we really come to think that when God created the universe he filled it with laws, and afterwards put some people in it; but that the laws were the nearest and dearest to him. God's government, men think, must be made holy and just and good in the sight of all men, and must stand. And so the impression is that, first of all, God takes care of his government and his laws, and then does whatever he can after that. But I tell you, God does not take care of his government and his laws at the expense of his creatures. One would think, to hear theologians reasoning about God and the methods of salvation, and the motives of divine procedure, that he was a fourth-proof lawyer judge, and that he sat surrounded by infinite volumes of statutes and laws, running back to eternity and running forward to eternity; and that in every case of mercy he said, "Let me consider first. Does it agree with the statute?" When a poor sinner comes to him, undone, wretched, miserable, he has to consult his books to see whether he can be saved so as not to injure the

law, saying, "Let us examine the law to see if it will do to save him."

Oh! away with this pedantic judge. Such a judge is bad enough in the necessities of a weak earthly government, and is infinitely shameful when brought to the center of the universe, and deified. There I behold God, flaming with love, backward and forward, either way, filling infinite space with the magnitude and blessedness of his love; and, if some questioning angel asks, "How shalt thou save and keep the law?' saying, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. My own will, my own impulse, my own desire, my own heart—that shall guide me. What are laws, and what are governments, and what is anything compared with a sentient being? I am law, and I will govern." God's presence is everything that government needs; and he says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; I will not be checked; I will be an ocean, without a shore, boundless, meeting but itself, and rolling in an eternal harmony and blessedness of love.

In our preaching I think we fall just as much behind as we do in our personal experience and our theology. We have preached the truth—and that is right. We have preached justice—and that is right. We have preached the necessity of believing right, and of sincerity as well—and that is right. But, after all, the characteristic impression, produced by our preaching, I fear, has not been the influence of divine love. It has not been the real central working power of the ministry. It is that which melts the heart, it is that which encourages hope, it is that which inspires courage, it is that which cleanses, that is needed. Fear does but very little. Fear may start a man on the road to conversion; but fear never converted a man. Truth does something. It shows the way, it opens a man's eyes; but simple truth, mere intellection, never converted a man. No man's heart ever grew rich, no man's heart ever had a God-touch in it, until he had learned to see God as one whom he loves.

It was that which broke my heart. It was on an early spring morning. Oh! how full of music were the woods, as I remember them, that lay beyond my father's house on Walnut Hill, at Lane Seminary! But of all the notes of birds that sang in the trees on every hand, there was not one which sounded sweet in my ear. How full, on that morning, was the sky, of little fleecy clouds that ran hither and thither, sent on errands of nameless joy! And yet there was no beauty in them to me. I was borne down; I was sad; in a thousand ways I was orphaned and godless; until, suddenly, as the result of some readings and discussions preceding, I was raised to a conception of God, not as a Being who did things on plan, or on purpose, but as one whose nature was medicinal; whose inevitable and chief characteristic was love; who loved because that was existence to him; who poured out

his love upon all, whether they would see it or not, and whether they would take it or not.

In other words, when I had a God whom I could call Love, universal, infinite, ineffable, from that moment I said, "I can worship God. I can worship, not power, not threat, but Love. I cannot worship a God who, having created such a world as this is, and such creatures as these are, lays a line of strict justice upon them; but I can worship a God who deals with men as a father deals with his children."

Oh! what a hell this world has been! Oh! how men have been like grapes in the wine-vat, and had the blood crushed out of them! Tears and blood-drops have been innumerable; and the shores of eternity have been beaten on incessantly by the waves of sorrow and trouble that have rolled in from this world. And I cannot see in all these things any evidence that God is a Being of love. It is not until revelation brings before my mind the conception that behind these phenomena, that are transient, and shall pass away, there rises the blessedness, the riches, the heart of the Eternal Lover, that I can lie down and say, "Thou art my God. Do thou what thou wilt. Thy will be done in heaven, and thy will be done on earth; and chiefly, and first, thy will be done in this poor sin-sick heart of mine."

I can love *love*, but I cannot love mere justice. When, however, love is also just; when love is infinitely true and pure and beautiful; when love is radiant with taste; when love is that which spans the night with glory, and makes the day efflorescent with beauty; when you thus give to love the very attribute of grandeur—then it becomes all the more priceless. But first there must be love. Love first, and not justice; love first, and not condemnation. Let love be supreme, and then I can worship.

This, too, will give you to understand what it is that men mean by *faith*—if you will bear for a moment such a deviation. The reception of this true character of God in Christ Jesus, and the appropriation of it to your own self—that is what we understand by *saving personal faith*. The generic meaning of faith is simply such a use of your reason and your moral faculties that you are conscious of the great invisible truths of the realm. Faith is "the evidence of things not seen." It is the living, not in materiality as interpreted by sense, but in great truths that are interpreted by the moral sentiments, or by moral intuition.

But there are special faiths—for there may be a great variety of specifics under this generic. And the great special faith is that by which a soul, beholding Christ who is altogether lovely and loving, realizes it, or takes him home to itself, and says, "That is my God. He loves me. He gave himself for me." This is the supreme act of faith;

and this saves. It brings the mind into such a condition that it instantly is in communication with God.

A young man stands in a telegraph office, and along the line of the wires is the passage of electricity; and he hears the dumb ticks of the instrument; but they mean nothing to him. He looks on, as a child would look on; but still these various ticks signify nothing to his ear. But by-and-by the operator draws out from under the needle-point a long strip of printed paper; and it is a message from the man's father, saying to him, "Come home." Home-sick he has been, and longing for permission to go. And oh! in one instant, in one flash, how that young man's feeling is changed! A moment ago, as he looked on that dumb wire, it was nothing to him; but now he sees it as the instrument whose ticks have written that message from his father, "Come home."

Here was a heart conscious of its need, longing, yearning, homesick, going hither and thither; and not finding an answer to its aspiration, nor satisfaction to its longing, it is brought at length to that position in which the truth comes breaking through it. Partly by the imagination, partly by the reason, much more by the moral intuition, and more than all by the power of the Holy Ghost, the truth comes down upon the soul, saying, "Child thou art. The Father am I. I love thee with an everlasting love. Thy name is graven on my hand. As lovers carry the portrait of their dear ones, or have their names inscribed about their persons, so thy name is engraved upon my hand, and thy likeness has been in the palm of that hand." In that blessed moment of intuition there is a realization of that full form and experience of faith which works by love and saves the soul.

With this conception of the divine love in our minds, we are prepared to form some idea of the nature and issue of that mixed and strange course which we call human love. I think that when the Gospel has refined a community, and inspired industry, skill and education; when philosophy has cleansed it in certain directions, and art in certain others, and virtue in certain others; when the household is built up, and a man has a glorious father and a noble mother, and has been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and has been reared to believe a perfect system of theology, and has good health, and wealth enough, and good prospects, he is apt to sit down and say, "Well, I believe in my religion; and I do not see any reason for doubts, or fears, or any trouble whatever. Everything is clear to me. It is perfectly just that God should be what I hear he is." Persons who are wrapped in comforts and consolations do not feel any need. But suppose you should forget yourself; suppose you should take those sermons which you hear preached out of the pulpit,

of the exceeding justice of God, and of the sovereignty of God, and sit down and apply them, for a moment, to the Laplanders, and consider who they are; what their development has been; what the natural and artificial laws are under which they have been brought up; and what are the possibilities of human nature under such circumstances? Go on to the Tartars, and the Calmucks, and the Chinese; and to the islands of Oceanica—Sumatra, and Java, and the others; and to the great unexplored regions of Africa. Gather together the human races, and consider under what sun they have lived, and what privileges they have had, and what their nature is. Consider what the great God has created them to. Consider what wars have devastated them. And consider what men have been in civilized nations. Consider what the history of the globe has been. And then come back home again. Go out of your pleasant houses; go among men that are in trouble round about you. Take your statistics and solve the problems of actual life with them. Take into account the bankruptcy of this man, and the utter degradation of that man. Think how society treats a man who has transgressed its laws, and how hard it is for a man who has taken one wrong step to get back again.

Life is full of poisonous, jagged justice; and if a man take benevolence, with these doubts, and go out and look at life as it actually is, I do not know what will save him from infidelity, unless he has back of all phenomena a government and a Governor whose name and whose attribute is absolute Love, and from which he learns that all these phenomena are specious and illusory and transitional, and that the time is coming for them to take on other and more advanced forms.

You know that when the seed sprouts it dies. If the seed were a philosopher, it would think that a hard way to live. The seed dies before it lives. And so it is with men, in a spiritual sense. Sorrow is the frost that cracks the nut that lets the germ out into the ground. Troubles are God's rains in this world. Irritations, rude convulsions, rough experiences, by various methods—these are the means by which God is preparing a moral soil for the future. I do not know what the reasons are for these things. I cannot answer all the theological questions which arise among men, minister though I am. Doubtless you think that because I am a minister, I ought to know everything; but I do not know everything about theology. I know very little about it. I know very little about God. There is not a man nor a child here who does not think that he knows more than I do. The sum of my knowledge is this: I do believe in the Divine Being. My soul says, "Certainly there is a God;" and it says that that God is paternal; and that the divine government is a family government, and not a magisterial nor monarchical government; and that it is a personal gov-

ernment, generated in love, carried out in love, and to be consummated in love; and that behind the blackness, the tear, the pang, the wrong and the sin, there is to be evolved in the eternal ages the triumph of love.

For everybody? I cannot measure. All I know is this: if there be one soul that at last comes short of eternal life, it will be because that soul has stood up in the very tropical atmosphere of divine love, and that love has poured itself upon that soul without obstruction, and it was absolutely immedicable and unhealable. Only those will be lost whom love could not save; and if you are lost, it will not be because you missed a narrow switch, and just did not come out right; nor because you run off the track by being moved one-tenth part of an inch in the wrong direction; nor because you made mistakes in your faith; nor because you were unfortunate; nor because you did not do this, that, or the other thing which the churches prescribe; nor because you did not believe this, that or the other doctrine held by the churches. You will never be God's castaway until rivers of infinite love have been poured on you. And then, if you are not changed, ought you not to be a castaway?

What those steps are, or how they are to be taken, I know not. Only this I know: love is a fact; and the divine administration of love is a truth; and the ages are God's. And I have more faith in what Love will think it is best to do, than in what theologians think it is best to do; and I believe God will take this great sinning, sorrowing, blood-shedding world up into his arms, and comfort it, as a mother comforts her sorrowing children. And I believe that sighing shall flee away, that God will wipe all tears from men's eyes, and that all the sorrows which have made the earth wretched in days gone by, he will, in his own way, and according to his own good pleasure, medicate; so that at last the universal Father, with the universal household, shall sit central in the universe, God over all, blessed and blessing forever more.

Will you not join those who have faith in such a paternal government? Will you not belong to Him who calls you, if by authority, yet by the authority of love? Will you join yourself to the dark, to the selfish, to the brutal, to the ignoble? Will you not rise among God's people, who live by faith, by hope, by the sweet purities of a refined love? Will you not sign yourself his, and call him "*My* Saviour, *my* God," and say, with the apostle, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"?

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.*

Draw near to us, thou divine Spirit. Awaken all our moral sense and all our affection, and quicken our imaginations, that we may lift ourselves above fear, and above sight, and above the flesh, and above matter, and above all time and history, and every appearance of conflict, and call thee Father. How, through all the conflict of time, thy name breathes music! If thou art, and if love is with thee, abiding forevermore as the foundation of thy government, all shall be well. We know not what we are driving to, nor the way in which the world is traveling, that groans and travails in pain until now. Nor can we know what the unfoldings of things shall bring to pass. But if thou art love, and if thou dost interpret thy love to us by the language of love in the household, so that we may know God, even as children know their parents, and may understand thy will and thy motive, and all the feelings with which thou art administering, even as most beloved children understand the will and reasons which actuate their parents, then all is peace; and we care not what shall happen, for we know that in the end everything shall round up out of night into the morning of everlasting gladness. O Lord God! if the stretching out of the right hand of thy power, and if all the solemnity and amplitude of thy justice, are but the vocalizations of love; if we behold thee truest and best when we discern thee loving with an infinite love whose outpouring is the life of the universe; and if thou art our God most when we are nearest to thee in affection, then what can go wrong? What punishment is too much, which love inflicts? What suffering is too severe, which love thinks best? If thou art infinite in thy love, and art guiding infinite love in application by infinite wisdom, why should we not rejoice? All things shall now work together for good to them who love thee, and are beloved of thee. And so, what we cannot find in wandering thought, nor in the mazes of reasoning; what we cannot by searching find out without God, nor even in God, that we know by faith in divine love. And we rest in thee, and rejoice in thee. We rejoice alike in storm and in calm; in light and in darkness; by day and by night; in things troubled, and in things tranquil. Wherever we are—at home, or wandering wide among strangers; sick or well; prospered or turned over and over, as the leaf is whirled by the tempest, whatever befalls us is right. For all of life is but a little price for seeing thee by and by, and being in thy image, and being satisfied.

And we rejoice, O Lord our God, that we have the privilege of this faith, and that we may rest upon it, and trust all our hope, and our very souls to it.

Now, we pray that, as thou art love, so more and more the lineaments of our Father's face may appear to us. And grant, we pray thee, that we may be able to bring the spirit with which thou art ruling the heaven above, into our own hearts and households. Grant that we may be able more perfectly to love one another—to love one another with the disinterestedness of divine love, and with something of the divine patience, and with something of the divine richness. May we grow in that direction more and more.

Grant, we pray thee, that all households may be households of love. And more especially we pray, this morning, that thy dear servants who have come hither into our midst, and have, before their brethren, dedicated these children to the Lord Jesus Christ, promising to bring them up in the fear of God, and in the ordinances of the sanctuary, may never fail in their intentions. May they have wisdom and grace ministered to them, to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. May their children's lives be spared unto them. And yet, if it is best that they should fly away before the summer is over, we pray that they may fly as birds, and sing in the branches of the tree of life. And so may they sing that their

*Immediately following the baptism of children.

bereaved parents shall hear by faith their call, and come toward them every day, step by step, sure that they are nearer to all that they have loved and all that is gone before.

If there be any in the congregation who are bereaved of their children, and whose hearts are touched, this morning, by the sight of these sweet faces, that bring back recollections of their own, we pray that upon them may rest the cooling dew of divine comfort, and that God may be very near to speak consolation to them to-day.

If there be any who are mourning over their children, and are anxious for them, and are pained or troubled in their behalf, help them, dear Saviour, to-day, to stand in the midst of their brethren and realize the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God, and to cast their care upon him. For why should we cast those cares on God which are as the light dust of the road, and withhold those cares which, like the rocks, do crush us? May every one know how to cast heart-cares, and inward cares, and unspeakable cares, and sorrows, and troubles, upon God, who loves and cares for all his creatures.

And we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant that children may grow up in right ways in our midst, walking in the footsteps of their parents, in so far as their parents are following Christ. We thank thee that there are so many in our midst who have been taught to serve thee, and that there are so many who have grown up in our sight and are walking in the ways of virtue and integrity and piety. We pray that thou wilt grant a blessing upon them, and upon their children, and upon their children's children.

And we pray thee that thou wilt grant that all the members of this congregation may live and be converted, and have the presence of God their Father.

We pray that thou wilt sanctify all the afflictions that are sent upon us in thy providence—all losses; all bereavements and confusions; all labor in overmeasure. Whatever pressure is hard to be borne, whatever thing is too sharp for our patience, answer us, if we pray for its removal, "My grace shall be sufficient for thee." Oh! for that grace which is forgiving and victorious! Oh! for that grace which redeems life while we have it, and redeems it while it is passing away! Oh! for that grace which shall make death itself to us the sound of joy, that we may through it meet our God.

And now we pray that thou wilt bless us in the further service of the sanctuary—in speaking, in reading, and in all that we shall be called to do. And wilt thou bless all thy people who are gathered together to-day, wherever they are. And more and more may the fruit of the Gospel abound. May the preaching of thy servants be leavened with the Spirit of God, sent down from on high. If any of them are in difficult places, if any are in sickness and poverty and discouragement through lack of fruit, may they labor still by faith, persevering.

Grant us, this day, a special blessing of heart. As outward things are denied us, more abundantly may we have inward riches through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray for all the States in this nation—especially for those that are new, and for those that are struggling to lay the foundations of future days. Grant that schools and churches may spring up everywhere and minister to them and sanctify them. Grant that everywhere, all over this land, justice may prevail. More and more may it be humane. More and more may it be the justice of love. We pray that thou wilt make this great people, not greedy of power, not avaricious of wealth, but to desire truth, and purity, and righteousness, and liberty, and intelligence, and piety over all the earth. May we be strong, not for destroying, but for blessing. Let us be rich, not for luxury and selfishness, but for beneficence. And may this great land, calling itself Christian, be Christ's indeed.

And look upon the nations of the earth. Oh! grant that the time may speedily come when thou canst afford to sheath thy sword. Grant that the

day may so soon come of knowledge and of justice among men, that thou shalt not be obliged to chastise them with burning flames. May wars cease, and the provocations and causes of war, and all nations at last study the welfare one of another, and the whole earth be redeemed.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit. *Amen.*

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